

Northern Premier League Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy and Practice Guidelines

Updated April 2025

Introduction

These policy and procedures have been drawn up in recognition that there is an ever-present risk of abuse happening. It is our duty to prevent abuse and to take effective action when abuse is suspected or disclosed.

- Nobody should be abused.
- Abuse is unacceptable in all circumstances.
- People with learning/physical disabilities and/or mental health issues are more vulnerable to abuse.
- This document is about our determination to protect them.

Principles

The Northern Premier League 's Statement of Values:

1. To listen to people and treat them with respect.
2. To help keep people safe, healthy and fulfilled.
3. To enable people to make choices and decisions about their life.
4. To encourage and challenge people to achieve their ambitions.
5. To enable people to take their place in the community.
6. To speak up for people when they want us to and with their consent.

Good Practice Statement

Safety is embedded within good sound practice and the growing ability of The Northern Premier League users to protect themselves, make their views known and be listened to. The Northern Premier League is committed to maintaining practices that will most effectively protect people from abuse.

Scope

These guidelines are primarily concerned with the abuse of adults who engage with the services of The Northern Premier League . This can happen within all contexts and **may be** perpetrated by someone entrusted with the care and support of The Northern Premier League users by The Northern Premier League within any paid or unpaid

used to report abuse that “is believed to have been inflicted by others” such as friends, relatives and strangers. Separate and distinct guidelines exist for the protection of children and young people within The Northern Premier League .

Policy

1. All staff and volunteers are carefully recruited, using the appropriate safeguards that help to keep dangerous people out of our organisation. This includes carrying out DBS checks for all staff and volunteers as soon as possible and adhering to our Safer Recruitment policy.
2. A structured programme of induction is provided for all new staff, which takes account of their level of knowledge about vulnerable adults. Induction will ensure that employees know what behaviour is and is not acceptable, understand what might constitute abuse and who should be informed if abuse is suspected.
3. The Northern Premier League has written policy, guidance and procedures, which include the action to be taken following an allegation or suspicion of abuse.
4. The Northern Premier League will ensure that every user, or others on their behalf, is actively encouraged to comment and complain about the service they receive and take those complaints seriously.
5. The Northern Premier League staff, paid and volunteers, are in a position of trust and any betrayal of this trust will be viewed most seriously. Therefore, any member of staff suspected of abuse will be subject to disciplinary procedures. All staff have a duty to report and failure to do so is a serious abdication of responsibility and will also incur disciplinary action.
6. Any sexual activity between an employee or volunteer and The Northern Premier League user is unacceptable and will be treated as abuse, irrespective of any apparent consent.
7. It is our responsibility to deploy and train employees and volunteers in such a way as to prevent collusive relationships and potential abuse.
8. All staff and volunteers who come into regular contact with The Northern Premier League vulnerable users will be made aware of their vulnerability to abuse and will be taught to recognise and appropriately respond to suspicions or allegations of abuse.
9. Abusive people or practices should not flourish in a well operating organisation. The Northern Premier League’s evaluation process will assess its culture and

- vulnerable users which protects them from abuse.
10. The Northern Premier League will maintain links with local Social Services with the aim of ensuring that information on current regulations and guidance in the protection of vulnerable adults are obtained.

Schedule of Responsibilities

1. Directors

- I. To have an awareness of the issues relating to The Northern Premier League users and abuse.
- II. To create and review policy in consultation with the Project Manager.
- III. To identify any potential conflict that exists between The Northern Premier League and the local authority procedures and to modify policy as required.
- IV. To direct and oversee the work of the Project Manager in an investigation.
- V. To authorise and monitor any actions resulting from an investigation.
- VI. To decide upon what information should be shared with individuals and agencies during the course of and following an investigation into abuse.
- VII. To monitor staff and volunteer deployment in a way that deters collusive relationships and opens up opportunities for disclosure.
- VIII. Director: Carol Finnigan is the nominated Safeguarding Officer for the charity.

2. Chief Executive Officer

- I. To be responsible for carrying out an investigation into abuse.
- II. The enforcement of the policy and procedures.
- III. The initial assessment of any allegation or suspicion of abuse.
- IV. The reporting of alerted allegation or suspicion of abuse to the Directors, Police where appropriate, Social Services and user's family or 'significant other' i.e. report to family member when advised by Safeguarding Lead or Safeguarding Board.
- V. To know the Local Authorities procedures for reporting and investigating allegations or suspicions of abuse for each vulnerable member within their responsibility.
- VI. To deploy staff, including volunteers, in a way that deters collusive relationships and opens up opportunities for disclosure.

together with any recommendations for action.

3. All Employees including Volunteers

- I. To personally uphold The Northern Premier League 's policies and procedures.
- II. To be aware of abuse as an issue and to alert the Project Manager of any concerns, suspicions or allegations of abuse.
- III. To maintain vulnerable user's safety and well being at all times. Securing their immediate safety where possible and ensuring immediate medical attention.
- IV. To ensure their duty to alert overrides any desire to keep a confidence.
- V. To make clear and detailed written records when abuse is disclosed witnessed or alleged.

Definitions

Vulnerable Adult

Anyone over the age of 18 years who is in need of assistance by reason of mental, physical or learning disability, age or illness and who is unable to take care of him or herself against significant harm or serious exploitation which may be occasioned by the acts or omissions of other people should be considered as a vulnerable adult for the purposes of this document.

Separate and distinct guidelines are available for children under 18. (see Safeguarding Children Policy)

Abuse

Abuse is the harming of another individual usually by someone who is in a position of power, trust or authority over that individual. The harm may be physical, psychological or emotional or it may be directed at exploiting the vulnerability of the victim in more subtle ways (for example, through denying access to people who can come to the aid of a victim, or through misuse or misappropriation of his or her financial resources). The threat or use of punishment is also a form of abuse. Abuse may be a 'one-off' occurrence, or it may become a regular feature of a relationship. Other people may be unaware that it is happening and for this reason it may be difficult to detect. In many cases, it is a criminal offence." (Centre for Policy on Ageing 1996).

Categories of Abuse

Within these guidelines five categories are used:

- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional or Psychological
- Financial
- Neglect

Abuse is difficult to assess; situations are rarely as tidy or straightforward as these categories suggest. Many situations may involve a combination of abusive elements.

Physical Abuse is *“the use of force which results in pain or injury or a change in the person’s natural physical state?”*

Examples: Punching, slapping, hitting, pinching, shaking, burning/scalding, excessive or unauthorised restraint, forced feeding, poisoning, overdosing.

Sexual Abuse is *“the involvement of the individual in sexual activities or relationship they do not want and have not consented to or they cannot understand and are not able to consent to.”*

Examples: Masturbation, pornographic photography, indecent exposure, penetration or attempted penetration of the vagina, anus or mouth with or by penis, fingers or other objects, harassment. Enforced witnessing of sexual acts or sexual media, serious teasing or innuendo.

Note: Any sexual activity between a member of staff or a volunteer and a The Northern Premier League user or users is unacceptable and will be viewed as abuse in the first instance.

Emotional or Psychological Abuse is *action by the carer or other person which, while not of a physical nature, severely impairs the psychological well being of the individual.*

Examples: persistent threats, gross restriction of freedom, intimidation, racial abuse and harassment, neglect of cultural needs, shouting, swearing, withholding security and affection.

Neglect is *persistent or severe neglect of individuals to such an extent that their basic needs are not being met and their physical well being is seriously impaired.*

and shelter. Persistent or severe failure to assist with appropriate levels of hygiene, access to medical care, refusal to give prescribed medications.

Financial Abuse is *an individual's resources being inappropriately used to the advantage of another person. Including material exploitation and theft.*

Examples: misuse of a person's money, possessions; blocking access to these; taking possessions, theft, embezzlement, extortion of these through threats or pressure or manipulation.

Institutional Abuse

Although institutional abuse is not treated as a separate category in itself, it requires specific mention to highlight that adults placed within any kind of residential or nursing care establishments are potentially vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The dehumanising practices of institutional abuse may cause The Northern Premier League users to suffer through regimented routines, lack of privacy and dignity, en masse care and a lack of day-to-day choices. These practices were more common in the past, particularly in some long stay hospitals and larger residential homes. However, the danger of such practices exists wherever the right values are not promoted and upheld. The Northern Premier League is explicit in its value base. All job descriptions make it the personal responsibility of all employees to maintain the organisation's values and to "demonstrate an attitude towards others which is based on respect, dignity and equality".

Duty to Report

However difficult it may seem, all employees and volunteers have a duty to make known their suspicions of abuse. Failure to do so is a failure in our duty of care. Remember, an individual may not be able to alert anyone themselves, perhaps through failure to understand that the activity is abusive or through poor communication skills or through fear.

Reporting is not easy and often takes a great deal of personal strength and courage. Employees, including volunteers, who have reported incidents have already been exposed to disturbing information that could leave them feeling a range of emotions from sadness to anger and even guilt that they could not prevent the alleged abuse. Managers must be aware of these issues when receiving a report and ensure that

needs. (See Appendix 1 Flowchart)

Procedure for reporting an allegation or suspicion of Abuse

These guidelines follow four procedural stages:

- 1) Alerting
- 2) Reporting
- 3) Investigating
- 4) Monitoring

Alerting

Any employee or volunteer working with vulnerable users may be alerted to the possibility of abuse. Alerting could mean that you witness an act of abuse, a person saying that abuse has occurred, or suspicions raised by indicators listed in these guidelines. In carrying out these procedures the person alerted must keep detailed records of the initial cause for concern. Note down exactly what the complainant or alleged victim has said or indicated to you or what you have witnessed. Any such records must clearly separate factual information from expression of opinion. The employee must be aware that the report may be required later as part of legal or disciplinary action. If the disclosure is made by a The Northern Premier League user, employees and volunteers must accept what the person is saying and never make a unilateral decision to ignore or suppress a disclosure because it is thought to be fantastic or improbable. Do not make comments other than to be comforting and sympathetic. Report the incident or allegation to the Project Manager or group leader straight away. If you are not able to contact the Project Manager, for any reason, contact the Safeguarding Lead, or a Director. If employees or volunteers suspect their Manager of abuse or have concerns about their practices or behaviour towards a The Northern Premier League user or users, these concerns must be reported to a Director.

In an emergency situation the following steps should be taken.

Ensure the vulnerable user's immediate safety. This may involve immediately challenging the person abusing the vulnerable user, even though this may be difficult to do, and trying to persuade him or her to stop. (Personal safety should be at the fore before consideration is given to this action). Ensure immediate medical attention if necessary e.g. physical injury or trauma, reports of severe pain. Inform any examining doctor of the suspicion of abuse and that a written report will be required which may be used in legal proceedings.

- a) Placing any material evidence in a safe place.
- b) Not allowing vital evidence to be destroyed by lack of forethought or the passage of time, for example, evidence of a sexual assault could be destroyed if the victim takes a bath before he or she has been medically examined.
- c) Noting carefully any pertinent comments relating to the alleged abuse.
- d) Completing an accident/incident form, taking careful note of any signs of abuse.
- e) Contact the Project Manager.

Reporting

Whether or not the incident is reported further depends upon the Project Manager's assessment of the situation. The manager should use these guidelines together with their own professional judgement to make an initial assessment about whether the matter should be taken further as an issue of abuse. If the Project Manager is clear that the allegation is not one of suspected abuse, then it may be necessary for further action to be taken to deal with the matter as a complaint or an issue of poor practice. All decisions and actions must be clearly recorded at every stage, including any decision not to proceed.

If the allegation is suspected to be abuse, even if considered less serious, the following steps must be taken.

Advise the relevant Director of the situation and the proposed course of action at the earliest opportunity.

Notify the local Social Services office or named Senior Social Worker (refer to your local authority Policy and Procedures for Protection from Abuse/Protecting Vulnerable Adults). Inform the police if a crime is suspected. Inform the vulnerable persons 'significant others' (parents, relatives, partner, friends or advocate). The usual expectation would be that families or 'significant friends' would be informed about issues relating to the persons welfare, unless the person has made it clear that they do not wish them to know, or it seems not to be in the person's best interests. If relatives or friends are not informed, the reasons for this must be clearly documented. Where the alleged abuser is an employee or volunteer of The Northern Premier League the Project Manager must comply with the organisation's disciplinary procedure. The alleged abuser must be suspended from duty at once, pending a disciplinary investigation. This action is necessary in the best interests of both the alleged victim and abuser. Any information given or received verbally or by telephone must be confirmed in writing at the earliest available opportunity. Notify the alerter of your decision.

In every case where abuse has been alleged and reported, it will be necessary to complete an investigation for The Northern Premier League 's own purposes, in order to:

- a) Establish The Northern Premier League 's formal position in relation to the allegation.
- b) Comply with relevant disciplinary procedures.
- c) Identify any assistance required by the client.

It is important for the Project Manager and any other The Northern Premier League employee to work in full co-operation with the local authorities and police as part of any formal investigation. They must also seek to ensure the safety and welfare of the vulnerable users and staff and the interests of The Northern Premier League are kept to the fore. In appropriate cases, this may involve:

- a) The needs of the vulnerable user or users for explanation, reassurance, rest and immediate or ongoing medical assistance.
- b) The need to keep vulnerable user's families and significant others informed (unless they are involved)
- c) Support for employees/volunteers (in whatever capacity they are involved)
- d) Complying with The Northern Premier League 's personnel procedures
- e) Seeking to ensure effective joint working so that the individual/s in question are not repeatedly investigated/questioned.
- f) Ensuring that clear post abuse support plans are in place.
- g) The outcome of an investigation, leading to disclosure of abuse, together with any recommendations from the Project Manager must be reported to the Directors for discussion and confirmation of necessary action. A copy of the report must be sent to the Directors.

Monitoring

Any actions resulting from investigations will be monitored by the Project Manager who will report to the Directors.

Recording

For proper investigation and monitoring of abuse it is important that a record is kept of any part of a procedure carried out to alert, report or investigate whether unsubstantiated or not. These records are also important in the identification of abuse where it may be necessary to build up a picture from fragments of relevant information over time by recalling information of previous alerting. Managers should hold this

when abuse is suspected, who holds such records and who has access to them.

Promoting 'Safe practices'

Collusion/Inactivity

Employees and volunteers may be reluctant to report their suspicions as they are concerned that they will not be believed or will be ignored on the grounds of divided loyalty or friendship, in this case the employee should always report their concerns to a more senior person or a Director. Similarly, if employees or volunteers have concerns about the behaviour of a colleague, alerting could mean being faced with the possibility of breaking up friendships, upsetting colleagues and causing disruption to the lives of those who use The Northern Premier League . All staff and Directors must be aware of these barriers and give their full support to any person who reports in good faith.

Breaking through the Barriers of Collusion

Discovering abuse where collusion exists is extremely difficult, some of the most disturbing cases of severe and systematic abuse to people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable groups have happened within a setting of 'colluded silence'. These are environments where people deny or cover up their abuse or as a team of workers may be so tight knit or isolated that abuse is simply not found out. The victim or victims of abuse in this situation have little chance of disclosing or alerting. Individual staff who work within this kind of 'abusing Service' and do not like what is happening may not see any opportunity to report their concerns and are likely to take an easier option and leave. To overcome collusion Directors, staff and volunteers must firstly be aware of its potential to occur. They must look out for the indicators of abuse both amongst the vulnerable users and in the working culture of a team. In order to give vulnerable users and individual employees and volunteers the opportunity to disclose or alert, no one should continue to work without observation or scrutiny for any sizeable length of time.

Confidentiality

All employees and volunteers must be aware of the sensitivity for all concerned in matters of abuse. Strict confidentiality must be adhered to on a 'needs to know' basis, according to the reporting procedures contained herein.

Recruitment

prevent unsuitable people from joining the organisation. Appointing officers must fully adhere to the organisation's written procedures including:

- Recruitment and Selection Policy.
- Equal Opportunities and Employment Policy.

Recruitment procedures must be fully applied to all employees including full time, part-time staff and volunteers. All job applicants will complete in full a standard application form. Under no circumstances should unsupervised work commence before the following checks have been completed:

- Obtaining two references. References must be in writing and originals (photocopies or facsimiles are not acceptable). At least one of the references should be verified with the provider by telephone. Ideally the last employer should be a reference.
- Evidence has been provided to confirm the date of birth and acceptable recorded proof of National Insurance Number (obtained from a Birth Certificate, Passport and P45 documentation etc).
- The necessary checks have been made through DBS

All employees will be required to complete a satisfactory probationary period. During this time an employee will be fully inducted and will be required to demonstrate full competence to the required job standards. In addition, training on this policy will be given and formal evaluation will be undertaken.

The designated person for the protection of vulnerable adults is the Chief Executive Officer

Recognising Abuse

Key Indicators and Signs of Abuse

The aim of these indicators is to raise awareness of employees and volunteers to potential abuse.

The list below needs to be used as a guide only, with no indicator in itself providing evidence that abuse is taking place or has taken place. However, concerns pinpointed by these 'indicators' do constitute issues for concern and attention and may warrant action by alerting using the **'Procedures to be Followed' section 6 of this document.**

Physical Indicators of Abuse

circumstances.

N.B. Some people, particularly older people bruise easily, so that caution should be exercised before drawing any conclusions. However, employees and others concerned should always consider the reason for bruising and reach a judgement based on sound information and the context of the individual's situation.

HOWEVER, THERE ARE INJURIES WHICH ARE HARDLY EVER CAUSED NON-ACCIDENTALLY. THERE ARE ALSO WARNING SIGNS WHICH MAY INDICATE SEXUAL OR EMOTIONAL ABUSE OR NEGLECT.

Bruising

Some types of bruising are particularly characteristic of non-accidental injury:

- a) Hand slap marks.
- b) Marks made by an implement.
- c) Pinch, grab or grip marks: this could mean the person has been shaken, inappropriately restrained or forcibly moved.
- d) Black eyes.
- e) Bruising to buttocks, lower abdomen, thighs and genital or rectal areas could be an indicator of sexual abuse.
- f) There may be a pattern of bruising.

The level of care given is deteriorating to the point of suffering e.g. skin disorders, pressure sores, malnutrition and acute health needs being persistently ignored. Ill health, the nature of which gives cause for concern e.g. genital reddening and discharge, burns.

Behavioural Indicators of Abuse

Sudden, significant and unexplained changes in a person's behaviour and emotions. A person appears frightened, recoiling from the approach of employee(s), a carer or carers. Displays of fear, anxiety or severe agitation without an identifiable cause. Obvious unhappiness only in a particular environment or in relation to a particular person. Continual or unusual sexually explicit behaviour. Disclosure by means of odd hints and veiled comments.

Evaluating the Seriousness of Abuse

The major elements of Adult Abuse have been described in a grid form to assist employees and volunteers in establishing the seriousness of a particular incident or

It is most important that employees use this as a tool and guide only and continue to use their own professional judgement in reaching decisions. Employees must evaluate the impact and seriousness to the individual vulnerable adult as well as just the consideration of the act itself. This will assist in reaching a judgement based on the particular individual and the context and not looking at the act(s) in isolation. Even if a situation is considered to be "less serious" a full and thorough investigation should still be instigated.

Disclosures Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Stay calm and try not to show shock.
- Listen carefully.
- Be sympathetic ("I am sorry that this has happened to you").
- Be aware of the possibility of medical evidence.
- Tell the person that:
 - (a) He or she did right to tell you.
 - (b) You are treating the information seriously.
 - (c) It was not his or her fault.
 - (d) You are going to inform the appropriate line manager.
 - (e) The Northern Premier League will take steps to protect and support them.
- Report to your line manager.
- Write down what was said by the person disclosing, noting date and time.

Don't:

- Do not press the person for more details.
- Do not promise to keep secrets.
- Do not make promises you cannot keep e.g. "this will never happen to you again".
- Do not contact the alleged abuser.
- Do not be judgmental ("why didn't you run away?")
- Do not break the confidentiality agreed with the alleged victim and your line manager (to other members of staff – "it's just awful, something terrible happened to...")

Written Records Points to Remember:

- In some circumstances it may be possible to take notes at the time the allegation is being made. Try to note down what the person actually says, using their own words and phrases.

allegation is being made. Make a written report as soon as possible afterwards. Try to remember what the person said using his or her own words and phrases.

- In your written report factual information should be clearly separated from expression of opinion.
- Use a pen or biro with black ink if you possibly can.
- Sign and date your report.
- Complete Accident/Incident report when necessary.
- Be aware that your report and any written records may be required later as part of a legal action or disciplinary procedure.
- During an investigation phase it is particularly important that notes are kept on all interviews, telephone calls, information gathered.

FLOWCHART

– Procedure following allegations or suspicions of abuse.

